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INQUIRY

TOPIC: THE CIA

William Colby, 63, who was director of the CIA from 1973 to 1976, is the author of *Honorable Men — My Life in the CIA*. He practices international law and has joined the public debate on nuclear arms as an advocate of a freeze on nuclear weapons. Called the CIA's "soldier-priest," Colby was interviewed by USA TODAY's *Barbara Reynolds*.



William Colby

USA TODAY: Is it a policy of the CIA to lie to the American public as a recent congressional committee implied?

COLBY: No. The CIA does protect some secrets that it is required to protect, but beyond that it does not actively lie to the people.

USA TODAY: What types of things should be kept from the public?

COLBY: We are sworn to protect our sources. A law was passed about a year or so ago that said that anyone who consciously goes out to reveal our sources can be punished. I think that was a very good law.

USA TODAY: When are covert operations against other countries warranted?

COLBY: If there is a country that is important to our country engaged in a conflict between a brutal dictator whom we don't like and a ruthless terrorist who doesn't like us, there is a course of action other than choosing between those two. That is secretly helping some decent, moderate leadership to arise in the country, an alternative to those extremes. Now, that is exactly what we did in the Philippines in the 1950s.

times when the overthrow of a government is advisable?

COLBY: I pretty well objected to that in most of the cases that I recall being involved in. I objected to the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem in Vietnam. The value of covert political action is when you are building strength, not when you are trying to attack somebody else.

USA TODAY: Are there other instances of the CIA's deciding to overthrow a government?

COLBY: One time the president of the United States told the director of the CIA to do anything he could to make sure that Mr. Salvador Allende was not ratified as president of Chile in 1970. For six weeks the CIA did what it could to accomplish that and then stopped its program and had nothing to do with the coup three years later, which did overthrow Mr. Allende.

USA TODAY: Didn't congressional investigations show that the CIA was directly involved in that overthrow?

COLBY: It was involved in an attempt in 1970, which involved a bungled kidnapping (of Gen. Rene Schneider, com-

Agency doesn't lie, just keeps secrets

army). There was a lot of other activity in 1970, which was stopped a very few months thereafter. It didn't go on for very long, and the subsequent coup was conducted by the Chilean military without the CIA involvement.

USA TODAY: Congress has reported that the CIA helped plot the assassination of Belgian Congo leader Patrice Lumumba and conspired with the Mafia in an attempt to kill Fidel Castro. How large a role do assassinations play in CIA activities?

COLBY: None. Under presidential directive, the CIA is specifically directed not to engage in assassination activities. The Senate committee that investigated the CIA in 1975 for a full year looked into every corner of the CIA's activity. It concluded that no foreign leader had been assassinated by the CIA. That was not for lack of trying. In Mr. Castro's case, they included a contact with the Mafia. It was stupid. The action of Mr. Lumumba's death came entirely without any CIA connection. This was stopped by the opposition of a CIA officer before the action ever got out of CIA channels.

USA TODAY: What about recent reports that President Reagan wanted to overthrow the government of Surinam and our involvement in coup attempts in Ghana?

COLBY: I don't know anything about that. Charges occur

all the time, partly because of the hysteria with which the subject was discussed here in America in 1975.

USA TODAY: Is it necessary to hide CIA operations in the congressional budget?

COLBY: There wouldn't be anything earth-shaking if the total number would be known, but it wouldn't mean anything either. You wouldn't understand what it meant. Is it just the CIA? Or is it the military? If you went into it in great detail you would be exposing things that would be of help to the Soviets and others who are the targets of our efforts. It is not a secret from the Congress.

USA TODAY: Is U.S. involvement in Nicaragua to interdict arms to El Salvador, or is it to overthrow the government, as a congressional committee has said?

COLBY: The administration says that the purpose of the action is to interdict the flow of arms. I don't know the details of the project, and so I can't really comment on it.

USA TODAY: How do you square your support of the Nicaraguan rebels, who are accused of so many human rights violations, with your deep commitment to the Roman Catholic faith?

COLBY: You can not expect perfection in the behavior of any group. You have to make a judgment as to which group is going to be better than the other and support that one. I like to judge countries by whether refugees move toward them or away from them. The refugees seem to move away from the countries that are opposed to the United States and toward the countries that work with the United States. It was true in Vietnam and elsewhere.

USA TODAY: Why would a former CIA director support the nuclear freeze?

COLBY: To find me on this side of the issue is a logical extension of my interest in intelligence, the real purpose of which is to solve problems rather than having wars about them. We have used intelligence to limit the growth of nuclear weapons in the Salt I and Salt II treaties. We have used intelligence to lessen the dangers of outbreak on the Egyptian-Israeli front in the Sinai

Desert. If we use our intelligence in all the senses of the word, we will conclude that we don't achieve anything by building more of these weapon.

USA TODAY: You were criticized for Operation Phoenix — a plan to neutralize hardcore Viet Cong — which resulted in the deaths of 20,000 Vietnamese. Would you do it differently today?

COLBY: I think it was done very carefully. We put out very specific instructions that it was not a program of assassination. It was a lot better to capture or convince somebody to take amnesty. The communists now consider that program the single greatest threat to their eventual victory that they had.

USA TODAY: Are we getting bogged down in a Vietnam-like situation in El Salvador?

COLBY: The administration's program for Central America asks for \$3 of economic and civilian support for every dollar it asks for security work. That shows a full awareness that the real problems are social, economic and political, and that is the main area in which we have to make success.

USA TODAY: What did you learn from Vietnam?

COLBY: One thing is that we sent in too many military, and the administration is not going to do that. We are talking about the magnificent number of about 55 advisers. That is hardly a major force and secondly, the fact that we eventually let the Vietnamese fall. I think those who would be purist about insisting that the government be perfect before they could get any assistance are only concealing a desire to see the government fall. We should be ashamed of the fact that we let the government fall because we wouldn't send them the ammunition to use in the American guns that we had given them.

USA TODAY: What would happen if we withdrew assistance from El Salvador?

COLBY: It would be a bad mistake. We should work to overcome the abuses and the inequities in the social and economic fabric of the country. We should give them the support necessary to defend themselves against guerrillas who want to kill them and overthrow the government and replace it with the kind of hostile government that occupies Nicaragua today.

USA TODAY: Does the domino theory apply in Central America?

COLBY: Nicaragua fell and now we are defending El Salvador. If El Salvador falls, we will be clearly defending Honduras and Guatemala. There is no doubt about it.

USA TODAY: A congressional committee recently cut off funds for Nicaragua and authorized aid for friendly countries in Central America. Isn't there a danger of promoting a war?

COLBY: Helping them strengthen their own defenses against hostile enemy forces is a lot better than sending aircraft carriers or divisions of tanks. It is much better than talking about sending troops.

USA TODAY: Do you think CIA Director William Casey's stock transactions constitute a conflict of interest?

COLBY: He has advisers who review his holdings, and I am sure they are coming out with the right answers.

USA TODAY: Has the CIA stopped using dirty tricks against foreign governments and its own people?

COLBY: The CIA is a good institution and has some very fine people in it. It obeys the laws of our country and the massive investigations have generally demonstrated that the CIA, with very few exceptions, has done the work of its country in a fine fashion. There were mistakes and some abuses in the past, but they have been corrected.